Kasper Koenig (curator): Before the Law: Post-War Sculptures and Spaces of Contemporary Art, Museum Ludwig, Cologne

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ENCLAVE REVIEW

rawford 100

andesford Quay Gallery, Cork

rgal Gaynor

ls exhibition, celebrating 100 years of education the Crawford College of Art and Design building Sharman Crawford Street, is a quiet affair. curatorial organisation was admirable: recent aduates from the College (Tina Darb O'Sullivan, m Dalton, Lana Shuks and Raphael Llewellyn) re given the opportunity to put together a show in substantial institutional space under the guidance the experienced Cliodhna Shaffrey. But the need concentrate on the CCAD building, rather than on art educational institution, must have seemed poisoned chalice for the fledgling curators – until the early seventies it housed a technical college, the predecessor of the current CIT in Bishopstown. Alongside artworks by current members of staff, therefore, appear objects associated with the old Crawford Municipal Technical Institute, offering sporadic glimpses of a quite different educational environment: some prospectuses from the sixties, a replica of the ceremonial key with which the building was first opened, a clock that hung outside the director's office and co-ordinated the college's other timepieces, etc. The handful of memorabilia from the art college alongside these - two photographs of life-drawing classes from the Emmet Place academy, a single review notebook, a photocopy of an *Evening Echo* article about a student protest in 1991, etc. – only serve to give a taster of what might have been: an evocation of the Crawford as a changing art educational environment.

These fragments punctuate a selection of work from a number of Crawford lecturers and tutors. As the overriding impression is one of modesty (apart from a few pieces, such as Pádraigh Trehy's short film dramatising the psychological relationship of James Joyce to John McCormack in terms of the Shem and Shaun characters of *Finnegans Wake*, a sense of strong art-practical ambition is lacking) the viewer's thoughts naturally wander to the question of the relation of art teaching to art practice. On the basis of one or two artworks and a list of names, of course, this is never likely to amount to anything more than idle speculation, but it's tempting to see in the solid technical accomplishment of Colin Crotty's or Eileen Healy's paintings suitable models for a teaching practice.

The works were generally well-displayed, and I was particularly happy to have the opportunity to view Ailbhe Ní Bhriain's collaged digital video *Emigrant III* (2010), in ample space in one of the gallery's two arched cellars. This is the third time I've encountered her work, the first being at the *Darkness Visible* show in Galway in 2008. The second, at this year's eva, was sufficiently recent for it to be still active in my thinking. It's intriguing stuff, one of the best engagements with the possibilities of digital video I've come across. The capacity for image manipulation and collage runs the risk of producing a new literalness – fantastic or hallucinatory scenes that merely reinforce ingrained, prosaic understanding by extending it out to unencountered experiences. This is the weakness of much of Dalí's painting (when it isn't being out and out kitsch) – a floppy watch or melting body keeps the naturalistically represented watch or recognisable body firmly in place, it simply adds the diversion of the distorting mirror to its perception and raises the result to the status of the truly reimagined. Ní Bhriain's work has more in common with pre-war de Chirico (via the closing sequence of Tarkovsky's *Nostalgia*, perhaps), those paintings which justify the epithet 'metaphysical', and cast the viewer back on a consideration of temporality and spatiality.

As in de Chirico different experiences of space are combined in the same image, with each being given discrete zones (bordered by a curtain, screen, corner or horizon – this is clearer in eva's *Great Good Places*), sometimes gently transgressed (e.g. water laps from behind a screen through which the open sea can be discerned). The addition of motion to Ní Bhriain's images brings in another kind of zoning – layering. Drifting minutiae on the image's surface, for instance, give the impression of underwater currents, though the objects behind belong to an indoors scene and may be disturbed from time to time by what appears to be a breeze. The juxtaposition of different spatial experiences places emphasis on the images' temporality – a slow duration that includes motion, but not change, a kind of extended pause between acts (Virginia Woolf's intermediating section in *To the Lighthouse* comes to mind). In contrast to post-Newtonian concepts, time is understood by Aristotle to be a function of the innate changeability of the various beings. Such a way of thinking raises the question whether without change there could be any time. In Ní Bhriain's digital videos such an impossible, 'timeless' universe is made apparent.

Fergal Gaynor is a writer, independent scholar, member of Art / not art and co-editor of *Enclave Review*. His *VIII Stepping Poems and Other Pieces* was published by Miami University Press in 2011.
Crawford 100 was on view 24 May – 23 June 2012.

10 x 10: See You There

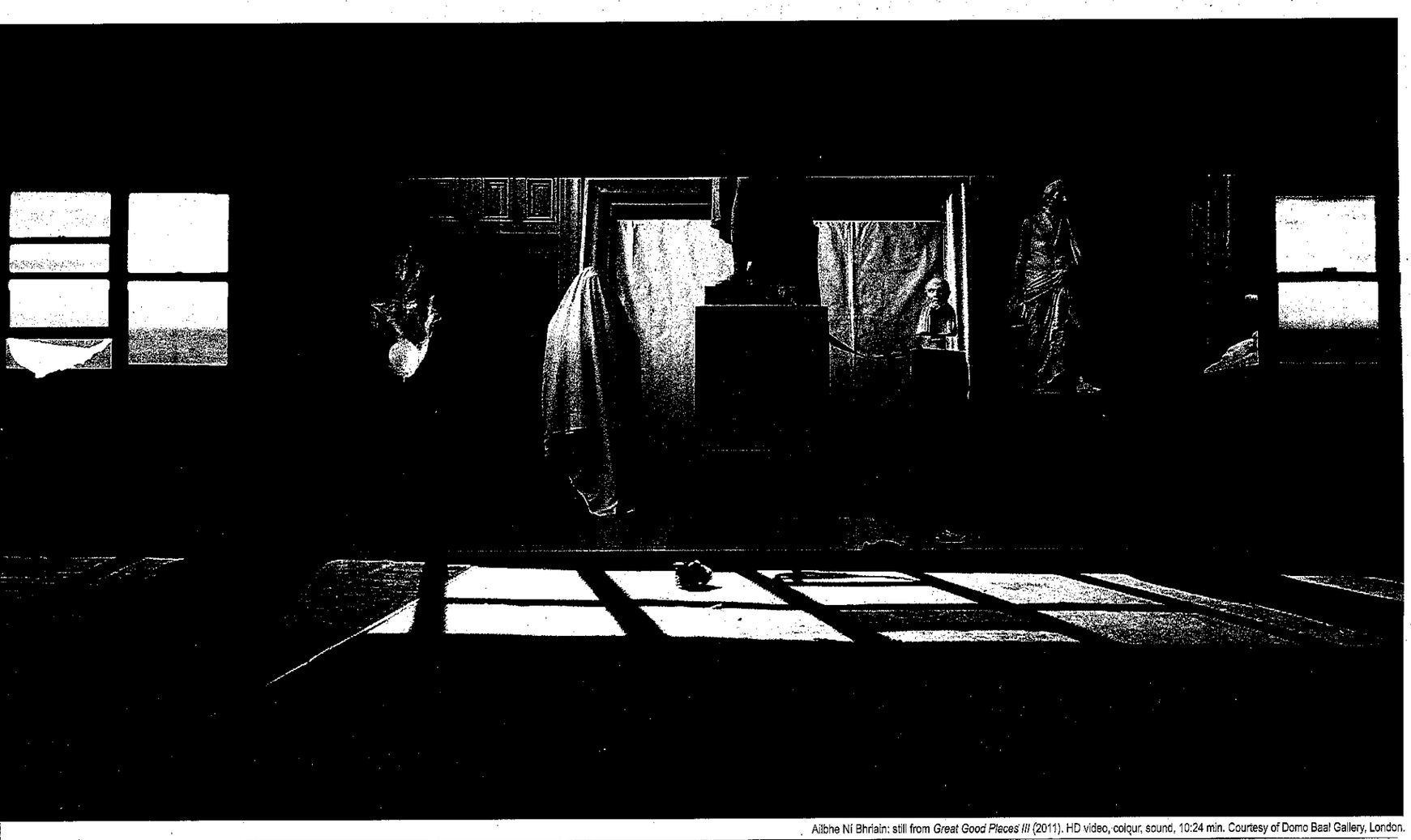
European Culture Congress, Wrocław, Poland

Klara Kemp-Welch

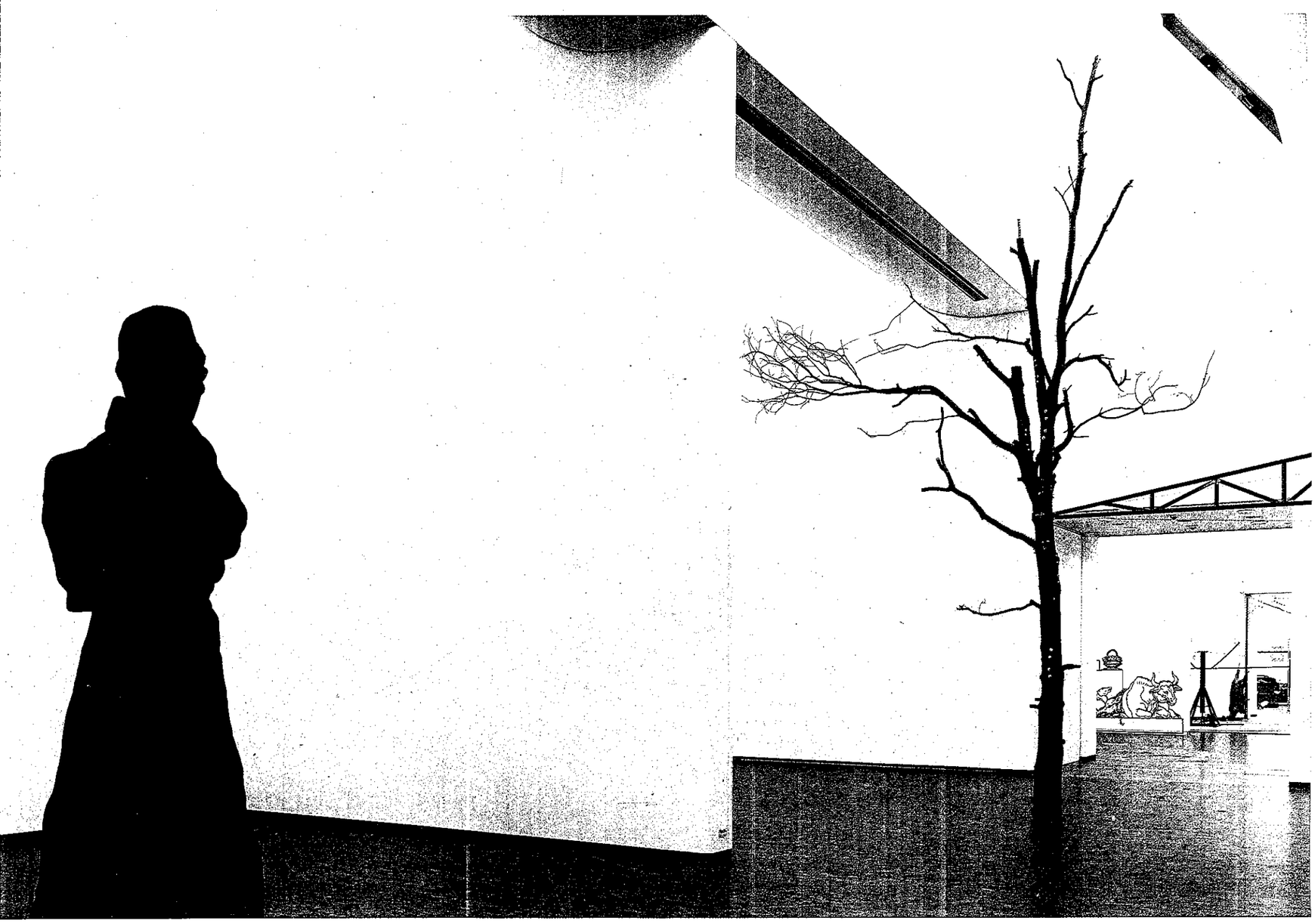
Wrocław (formerly Breslau) is a city in Lower Silesia that stands at the crossroads of central Europe; ruled over the centuries by Poles, Bohemians, and Prussians, it eventually became a stronghold of the Nazis and the last city to surrender to the Soviets in 1945. 70% destroyed by war, the city was returned to Poland, and, following Poland's annexation to the Soviet bloc, hosted the 1948 World Congress of Intellectuals for Peace, famously attended by the likes of Bertolt Brecht and Pablo Picasso. An extraordinary historical melting pot, it is small wonder that Wrocław is scheduled to be European Capital of Culture in 2016. The three-day European Culture Congress, held at the partially revamped site of the 1948 Congress, attracted thousands of visitors with an ambitious programme of events designed to interrogate what it means to be European, today, and to propose culture as a key agent of social change. The visual art component was largely overshadowed by the Congress's music and theory programmes (Penderecki and Bauman, respectively, both packing thousands into the enormous 'Jahrhunderthalle' - a landmark of Modernist architecture designed in the 1910s by Max Berg). Nevertheless, the exhibition section, a project entitled *10x10* in which ten young curators were each asked to show work by ten artists, yielded an understated gem of an exhibition: *See You There*, curated by Ivana Komanická, from Košice.

See You There explored contemporary cultural economies in relation to giving, taking, and responsibility. Komanická asked important questions about the vulnerability of art and artists, particularly in post-1989 Central Europe. It was therefore fitting that the exhibition was installed in a precarious non-place of sorts, one that, at first glance, would seem to be a curator's nightmare: a passage with a staircase, a corridor, and four doors leading off, and a continuous stream of cultural tourists passing through. Through a series of interventions, Komanická transformed this transitional space into one where passers-by paused, congregated, and engaged in discussion.

A short, intense man with long hair and a beard sat outside, smoking. He invited all and sundry to rummage through the contents of what looked like an open coffin - a car roof box full of letters and magazine clippings outside a dilapidated pavilion. People took whatever they liked, morphing into vultures feasting on his precious yellowing documents, not without a discernible sense of unease as their once-owner, Milan Adamčiak, watched this sifting through of his intimacies, with a smile. He was giving away his archive, amused at the spectacle of others' desire for this detritus, which, only a few years back, had been strewn across the main street of a Slovak village, following its owner's eviction from temporary accommodation. But he seemed like a man who has



Ailbhe Ní Bhriain: still from *Great Good Places III* (2011). HD video, colour, sound, 10:24 min. Courtesy of Domo Baal Gallery, London.



allation view: *Before the Law: Post-War Sculpture and Spaces of Contemporary Art*. Foto: Achim Kukulies © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2011 and Zoe Leonard

ppings of institutionalized history – history with capital H. At the same time her strangely surreal ages strip the museum and its monumental spaces self-importance, poking fun at the manner in which story is packaged for consumption.

History in its guise as personal narrative, as a story handed down through generations, is plored in the work of Beth Atkinson, which explores e way in which anecdotes blend with folklore and th in the storied Epping Forrest. In her evocative lit screen video piece, the artist's mother sings ultaneously the melody and harmony of a folksong at originated in the locality. The forest is further cumented by two almost identical photographs uprooted trees, massive and monumental ruins, ir eerie similarity hinting at the ease with which e could loose oneself in such a landscape. The ck-story to the work is revealed on a printed card, mirroring tales of two asylum escapees separated more than a century, wandering through the oods, their paths crossing. The intertwining strands Atkinson's enigmatic work provide insight into the ocess through which a memory of a place's history created and signified.

This is a subtle, ambitious and thought-voking show, all the more impressive given its ninutive size. The Basement Project exhibition ace is physically tiny, but its determination and drive encourage dialogue between practitioner, practice d viewer is ably demonstrated here. The economic wnturn that so decimated the commercial gallery ene in Cork has ironically made room for more perimental and resourceful artist-led initiatives at have begun to colonize and revivify the city's cant commercial spaces. Given that museums, numents and art galleries provide us with public nues in which we can try to make sense of the rld and our history, this exhibition which questions e way in which historical memory is reified and nsumed, is as heartening as it is compelling.

arah Kelleher is currently a student on the MA Modern and Contemporary Art at UCC. *The spension of History* was on view 8 - 16 June 2012.

Kasper König (curator): Before the Law: Post-War Sculptures and Spaces of Contemporary Art

Museum Ludwig, Cologne

Mia Lerm Hayes

Kasper König is retiring following a career as one of the most highly regarded European curators. He was co-initiator of Münster Sculpture Projects, which takes places every decade and has revolutionized our idea of sculpture, public art and the monument since 1977. It is, therefore, not surprising that the focus of this swan song is sculpture, and that Penelope Curtis (former director of the Henry Moore Institute) is one of the authors of the catalogue. The post-war theme is also understandable when König's associations with Münster are brought to mind, but probably owes more to the function of the show as summary of a curatorial lifetime.

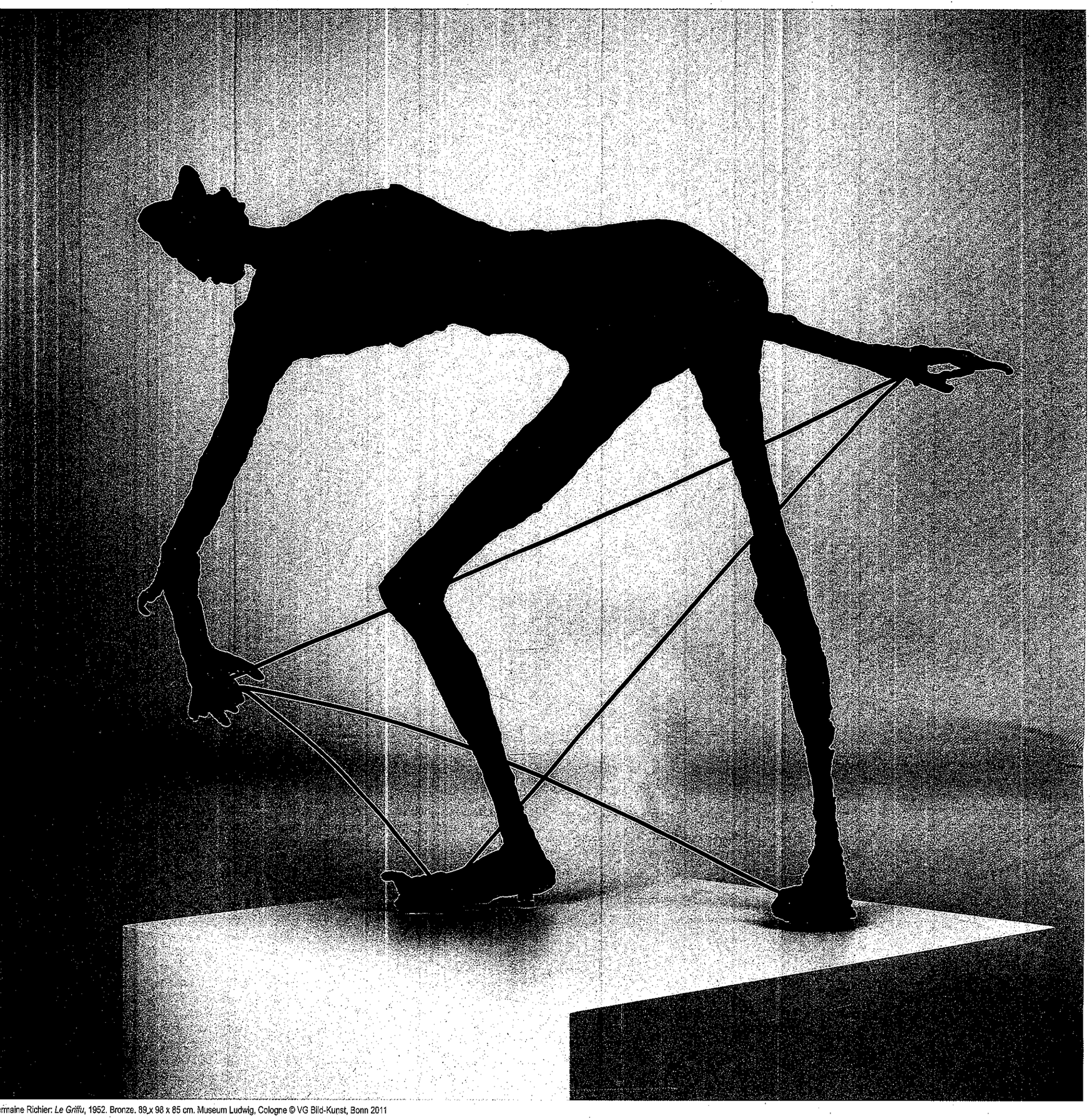
Museum Ludwig is, of course, rich in post-war art, but the American Pop Art for which it is famous doesn't feature very prominently, despite the fact that Claes Oldenburg and Andy Warhol were the first two artists König exhibited in the 1960s. George Segal, the most pensive artist of that generation, is included and sits well in the show. Before the Law's combination of Modernist with contemporary work is not as unprecedented as the unique occasion would lead one to believe, but this current trend for programmatically diachronic exhibitions has found in this instance a steady curatorial eye that combines well the 'threads' and emaciated torso of Germaine Richier's *Le Griffu* (1952) with Bruce Nauman's cast cadavers, suspended from a macabre *Carousel* (1988) and the support of Zoe Leonard's *Tree* (1997/2011). The occasional glimpse out of the building onto Cologne Cathedral and passing railway line, mementoes of Germany's War-time destruction and subsequent – belated, but generally earnestly undertaken – work of mourning, confirm the venue as the ideal site for the show. The earnest tone is obviously one that again resonates with contemporary practice (pace the carefree, fresh, 'superficial' air of Karla Black's work).

The gruesomely powerful Jimmy Durham installation, *Building a Nation* (2006), which exposes the racist foundations on which the USA is built (doubtless bought by König in order to counter-balance the all-too-uncritical American self-confidence emanating from much of the core of the Ludwig collection), initiates a series of invitations for international and diachronic comparison or transferability of issues. William Kentridge expands the topic into the international realm. Far from letting the show become a re-run of Documenta 11, however, the strong presence of Wilhelm Lehmbruck with *Seated Young Man* (1916/17) – here 'post-war' means 'during WWI' – attempts a reconsideration of the importance of certain enduring, though non-heroic war memorials. The catalogue highlights the failures inherent in post-war sculpture – i.e. its paradoxical solidity, its undecided hovering between sublimation and action – arguing for a renewed engagement with it. Alberto Giacometti has a central role to play in this regard and is present with *Le jambe* (1958). The viewer may associate that aesthetic, and the post-war theme, with Beckett, but Kasper König's reference is Kafka.

This is where this exhibition's surprise may lie. If it didn't already do enough in intertwining life-, art- and curatorial history as a farewell to and plea for the museum – as site of a public art collection and playing a vital part in recording and forging the cultural memory and identity of a society – it also suggests that König's brother Walther's bookshop in the same building is not just a coincidental money-spinner for the institution, but a necessity for a museum that understands itself as a driver of discourse concerning important societal issues. That König began his career as professor at Düsseldorf and Frankfurt Academies goes some way to explain his desire to draw exhibition-goers into engagement with various texts. For the present viewer, there could hardly be a clearer 'case study' of the currency and strength of the European tradition of 'literary art exhibitions'. The *Before the Law* catalogue is an admirable addition to this tradition, and the beautiful and important volume documenting Paul Chan's staging of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in New Orleans post-Hurricane Katrina, on display in the bookshop, provided a particularly successful example of the extension of visual art into the realm of the discursive, existing beyond the exhibition.

To include Kafka in a visual art exhibition is to point to certain intellectual roots: Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'minor literature', for instance – immediately political, de-territorializing and community-forging. Contemporary artists have often found this to be a liberating conceptual framework – hence (to put it too simply) their interest in literature and the now obsolete form of the book. Deleuze and Guattari's terms, 'plateaux', 'rhizomes' etc., have frequently been employed for exhibitions, thought of in Deleuzian terms as a temporary coming together in a thoughtful, rhizomatic knot, only to disperse again. There was even something like an explosion of Deleuze and Guattari references in the mega-exhibitions of 2001. To deploy the intellectual tools of guerrilla warfare in multi-million euro art events is problematic, of course, and the new, engaged institutionalism characterized by this conflation is also clearly aspired-to here in Cologne. The reference to Kafka, therefore, enabled König to curate a temporary 'rhizome' of intellectual credibility, while at the same time 'taking flight': the Deleuze and Guattari reference is rendered indirect through the foregrounding of Kafka, thus faithfully/unfaithfully signalling independence, and possibly re-instating the 'minor', too. Quite a shrewd move!

What is missing from this show? Sculpture (when even remotely figurative) places emphasis on gesture (there is also the reconstruction of an exhibition on the 'pathos formula' by the concept's innovator, the art historian Aby Warburg, to be viewed in Cologne at the moment). One could have imagined performance art as a valid addition and counterpoint



rmaine Richier: *Le Griffu*, 1952. Bronze. 89 x 98 x 85 cm. Museum Ludwig, Cologne © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2011

practice addressing post-war matters – or am following too personal a predilection? An artist uch as Boris Nieslony comes to mind. In her text, enelope Curtis elaborates on the role of sculpture in ined, German cityscapes (Documenta 1), focussing articularly on Cologne and Heinrich Böll's keen terest in ruins. She does not, however, mention eclan Clarke's *Cologne Overnight* (2010) which urator Regina Barunke has nevertheless already nown here at Kölner Kunstverein.

To refer to Kafka explicitly in an exhibition to represent the curatorial undertaking as tentative nd probing. This is desirable: despite all the logistical nd legal manoeuvring needed to bring a large xhibition such as this to fruition, in the final count o engagement with art can make claim to perfect ontrol and comprehension. Art 'skims along the dges of what is permissible', as the exhibition guide lls the viewer. In this case, König's Kafka reference of fortuitous complexity: on the one hand a humility ope, it becomes a canonical reference on the other, giving the 'group show' blockbuster qualities (the English language catalogue has already sold out). It also contains an argument for art's appropriateness and strength in dealing with difficult subject matter, while simultaneously displaying art's productive weakness. It may also be a slightly nostalgic gesture towards the ideals of König's youth around 1968. That Kasper König can foreground through Kafka the tentative, unfinished and 'edgy' in his last conceptual exhibition honours him, and it is only slightly ironic that – unlike the writer – a curator can never bring his works to the public posthumously.

Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, writer, curator and Reader at University of Ulster, Belfast, currently Visiting Prof. University of Cologne. *Before the Law: Post-War Sculptures and Spaces of Contemporary Art*. Exhibition catalogue ed. Kasper König, Thomas D. Trummer et al. Museum Ludwig, Museumsdienst Köln: Köln 2011. *Before the Law* was on view 17 December 2011 – 22 April 2012.

Editorial

Editors: Ed Krčma and Fergal Gaynor
Assistant Editor: Rachel Warriner

Email: enclavereview@gmail.com
Online Archive: http://enclavereview.wordpress.com/

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